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Connecticut

Association of Urban Superintendents

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## **S.B. 948 – An Act Addressing Education Funding and Racial Equity in Connecticut**

Testimony by

Superintendent Mark Benigni, Meriden Public Schools

Superintendent Sal Pascarella, Danbury Public Schools

Chairmen McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

We are testifying as co-chairs of the Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents.

We thank the General Assembly for taking bold steps in 2017 and enacting an Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula that takes student learning needs and community wealth into account to determine how much the state should be providing districts so they can offer the high-quality educational opportunities every student deserves. Unfortunately, this funding was scheduled to be phased in over 10 years, and even more disappointing, the governor's budget proposal would pause that phase-in and delay full funding even further.

There is another option though. SB 948 would fully fund the ECS grant and provide an immediate infusion of funding for the state's neediest students and schools. This is money urban districts need now, not seven years down the road.

We know Connecticut is a highly segregated state. Most students attend a district where more than 75 percent of the students are white, or a district where more than 75 percent of the students are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). A majority of the state's BIPOC students are concentrated in just nine districts. These are the state's highest-need districts, but districts with majority BIPOC populations spend roughly \$2,300 less per student than majority white districts. That translates to a \$639 million funding gap between Connecticut's majority white districts and all other public school districts.

We support the changes to the weights for English Learners and concentrated poverty, which will drive greater funding to districts for equitable learning opportunities for our neediest students. Lowering the concentrated poverty threshold will also provide additional funding to districts that need it the most. Currently, to qualify for the concentrated poverty weight, at least 75 percent of a district's students must be eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Only four districts currently qualify for the concentrated

poverty threshold: Hartford, Meriden, New London, and Waterbury. That districts like Bridgeport, Danbury, East Hartford, New Britain, or New Haven do not qualify for this weight prove this threshold is set too high. By lowering the concentrated poverty threshold to 60 percent, as provided in the bill, districts, along with Ansonia, Manchester, Naugatuck, Norwich, Torrington, and West Haven could qualify.

We urge you to support SB 948 so that our urban districts can realize the equitable state support they were promised in 2017 when it is needed most – now.

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